

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE BETWEEN CONSERVATION AND INNOVATION

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The territory has taken its present aspect, compared to a former (and perhaps imaginary) “naïve” condition, through an unbroken continuity of changes induced by political, social, economical, technological reasons in the succession and in the growing up of the urban and productive settlements, of cultivations and their techniques, in the implementation of roads, canals, railway, until the recent wind farms. They suggest how the conservation project of the environment is rather connected to the qualification of interventions, than their exclusion.

Already in the XIXth century, the territory was defined by Carlo Cattaneo as "the immense depot of hard work", the "artificial homeland" of the different generations; in the following century and a half, that character then attributed to "every Civil region" has largely extended to a global scale, with its interrelations and the problems of identity and diversity, also including the themes of landscape and its management (Industria e morale, Milano, 1845).

We intend to analyze the connection between conservation and sustainability considered as evaluation of the heritage, virtuous propeller for the enhancement of those environments that were affected by a historical continuity of functions until the industrial revolution, when the consolidated relation between social organization and agricultural conduction was interrupted by the emerging of new conditions, that beyond the immediate impact integrated into the contemporary consistency.

At the same time, certain consequences of these processes have led to a serious loss of values, that perhaps only time and the expected affirmation of a "virtuous" way of intervention on the territory will partly compensate.

DEFINITION AND SPECIFICATION

Landscape methodological studies oriented to protection: “state of arts”

The broad debate of recent years about the definition of landscape and its values in its different meanings has developed towards its understanding and the correlation of the many components of the landscape historic transformations, denying the principle of division between the natural and built or historical landscape, which proposed the critical distinction of their appreciation and therefore the methodology of the protection of their values.

From the Charter of Bruges (June 1974) to the Charter of Krakow to –in the recent Italian Cultural heritage Code, criteria and aims of recognition of cultural landscapes and their preservation have been defined. This leads to operate a complex judgment, to fulfill safeguard not based on aesthetical or historical reasons or just on practical convenience, but considering all the components implied in this decision, which will have a cultural value because this approach will optimize in a sustainable way the system of the different requests.

It seems a now accepted idea that landscape is neither reducible to individual places and objects that stand in the territory, nor only to their "system", but to the recognition of a network of interdependencies, a "structure" that nowadays allows to recognize elements classifiable by types and ensembles, particular and specific physical presences on the territory, that characterize each environment.

Recognizing the morphological and historical identities of landscapes, the value assigned to them by people (the locals, but not only), the dynamics that transform them, provide for and define the tactics for their sustainability, are the aims implicit in the most recent European Conventions about these topics. Dealing with cultural landscape conservation doesn't mean highlighting the aesthetic values or the tourist susceptibility, but identifying the reasons for the merits and problems, trying to plan the becoming at the different management and policy scales.

To get closer to the subject through some actual examples, we are going to talk about the Piedmontese territory, in the northwest of Italy, near Turin already capital of Savoy, then "ville industrielle", which in the post-industrial globalization looks for a new identity, in the myth of the Baroque capital and of the royal Residences, in the advanced research and design, in the culinary traditions, in the skiing facilities and anything that can attract international tourism.

Among the positive resources there are the historical evidences of the rural landscape, at least for the parts not yet too compromised by the development of large and small urban centers, by the industrial settlements along the roads and by the uncontrollable "cottages" that constitute an aspiration indiscriminately shared.

The agrarian conduction through different strategies has always been the resource for the representation of religious and feudal prestige, and in more recent times the image of a cultured land-middle class. Investigating, through some examples, specific realities means to deal with development strategies, which in the territory are inseparable from the recognition of certain historical vocations in the use, from the architectures, from the settlements, from the infrastructures. This is the case of the farmhouse system with dwelling house or villa that have been the economic source not only for the individual owners, but also for the formation of noble buildings such as holiday or temporary residences (first, those of sovereigns) but also in the city, the palace or the convent, the monastery or the parish. The whole territory took part with its economic and material products in these large-scale initiatives (clay for the bricks, wood from the trees, rows of the border, gardens and parks), so that – as Ruggero Martinez had said – monuments were only emerging tips of the territorial socio-economic iceberg, now eroded in its territorial premises and whose conservation descends necessarily from the ability to build a different system, that establishes a new compatibility and sustainability of these objects and their landscapes.

Even in villages of small and medium-scale this mix among the surviving cultivated areas and the industrial zones spontaneously settled there or grown according to town-planning scheme choices along the historical (displacing the nineteenth century wooded avenues) and new roads still survives (such as in the case of the Berroni).

The agrarian settlements were supported and qualified by the presence of a noble residence with a park and a garden and for the same reason productive places were improved in their possessions. The following examples can demonstrate the positive synergies that were produced through these transformations.

The same is for the church possessions, such as those of the Savoy religious-knightly order of Saint Mauritius and Lazarus in the territories of San Benigno near Cuneo. The interventions of agrarian implementation assured the commendatory abbots the resources both to reinvest for the maintenance and enlargement of the acquired ancient abbeys (Staffarda) and for the renovation or construction of new monumental locations (Casanova, Fruttuaria).

The interaction between land government, irrigation system and cultivations through subscribed regulations ("pacts") and practices enabled great investment in works of architecture (sometimes with prestige purposes only) and at the same time an absolute control of the territory.

The integration among natural features, the permanence of cultural landscape characters and the promotion of agricultural activities in the most convenient regions becomes then a development action, different for each reality. But nowadays, the territories around the cities are rapidly changing with hardly controllable mutations of those systems that have established the identity of cultural landscapes. Actually, not only the expansion of built-up areas, but road infrastructures have lied over the historic landscape design.

Between 1800 and 1814, Piedmont was conquered by Napoleon, annexed to France and divided into five Departments. The new political condition gave advantages to the middle class and the most enlightened members of the old land owners classes. The road system was widely rationalized, other than the transalpine connections and those towards Italy; a precise cadastral evaluation of the

territory promoted the agricultural development, despite the heavy economical difficulties after the Russian expedition.

The opening of the city towards the country, after the demolition of the fortifications, is settled in the napoleonic plans with a ring of boulevards (realized) and with a belt of gardens between them and the borders of the existing built-up area. The extension to the hill of the principal urban perspective, "contrada di Po", in the new bridge on the river crosses it.

The most notable examples are those of Venaria Reale, Racconigi, Agliè and Pollenzo, hunting and loisir seats, that grew up together with their surroundings of farmhouses, extended in the territorial system.

In particular the Agliè Castle, once ancient domain of Lord San Martino, when it was acquired to its feuds with Bairo and Ozegna, it was reorganized through the foundation of new farms and the enlargement of some others

Also the park of Racconigi castle, enlarged and transformed in the XVII-XVIIIth centuries in a wonderful manor, was renewed around 1840, by the landscape architect Xavier Kurten. The northern part was planned by Palagi, Melano and Sada and included in king Carlo Alberto's program. A model farm was realized, with new fanciful neogotic architectures (the "Verne Manor", the greenhouse, the agrarian buildings). The Residence was bought by the Italian Government after the second half of the XXth century. After the recent restoration of the palace and of the park it has been open to visitors.

Another example is the castle of Pollenzo renewed in 1830-40 by Pelagio Palagi and Ernest Melano according to the romantic taste. In the north there are monumental neogotic buildings (the porticoed square, the church, the "Agenzia"), in the south the river Tanaro was deflected to constitute an island, a romantic lake, once crossed by suspension bridge. The whole territory was enclosed and arranged by king Carlo Alberto as a farm for the improvement of the agricultural production. But utility was also pleasure.

These transformations brought new morphological and productive land settlements, not devoid of an intentional component of qualification of the landscape and architectural values too: this is the case of the reorganization of rice cultivation in the territories around Novara and Vercelli, that involved the rational plani-altimetric construction of the rice field system, the new network of canals for their irrigation, the system of productive centers, where castles and manor houses were included in new settings of lasting and temporary housing for the numerous workers engaged in the various stages of production, stables, storehouses for tools, processing equipments and warehouses for the rice storage and packaging.

This is a landscape changing during the seasons, which varies in the boundless chessboard designed by dikes, canals, agrarian roads, characterized by the green of the little plants and by the colors of the stretches of water reminding the blue sky, where castles and the nineteenth century middle class' buildings reflect their images.

This territory is strongly characterized and the sustainability of its settlements (and of its ecosystem, which included fish, frogs, mosquitoes...) is nowadays in severe crisis: workers' houses, stables, storehouses, warehouses are now replaced by mechanization, fertilizers and herbicides.

Any roof falling under the weight of hail and the lack of maintenance is quite unlikely to be rebuilt; abandonment and ruin of anything that still witnesses the social organization and the memory of those who built it with intelligence and effort is accompanied by the development of mass production efficiency of the territory.

The rectification of the roads already started from the second half of the eighteenth century established direct links between the inhabitants covering the farm road system and it has simplified the exchanges and the development of the territories, production and economy, such as from the second half of the nineteenth century the railways and the today's highways, on the other hand in many cases it has gradually divided cultivations from settlements.

The territory of Pinerolo is an example of these changes. Located between Turin and Sestriere, on the occasion of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games it has been involved in the realization of a new essential road infrastructure, that has split and separated the agricultural activities, subordinating the accesses to its crossings, that attract programs of expansion and settlements of activities, from the touristic ones to the car breakers. For example near Pinerolo the farms of Colombretto, Peschiere, Ainana, Galetta, Losetta

These progressively erode a historical continuity, that has been built over the centuries as a consistent transformation, depending on the variations of cultivations and enrichments of the owners, in their prosperity or in their decadence.

From the thirties of the XIXth century, the city enlargements are realized in parts, inside the customs barrier (1856) that includes the built-up areas and the country, and it is crossed by the old roads and by the new railways. From 1907 later on, the city extends as far as to cover the whole metropolitan area.

On the other hand, this process was reversed in some areas, because of the increase in value of certain products, such as wine in the territories of Roero and Barolo, but changing its characters according to the new technologies. It is the case of the development of the cultivations placed across the contour lines rather than along them as it was in the past or worse the cultivations that now are perpendicular to the contour lines as a consequence of the use of tractors.

And it can't either be given a rigid rule of operating that uniform the interventions of restoration and changing of use as in a kind of manual. Anyway it remains open the opportunity that the intervention, even if organized in a general planning, takes into account the specificities of buildings so that a heritage not recognized of experiences will not be spread and homologated to a superficial interpretation that privileges the historical phase, usually the oldest, and completes it with some characters even if never subsisted.

IMPROVEMENTS AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The territory witnesses in its various components the knowledge of the past, but also its flexibility towards innovation, meditated and stored in the evolving continuity of techniques as it is for the Susa valley.

Preserving these objects does not mean opening an undifferentiated catalogue of consistencies throughout the territory, privileging those best known, but awakening towards an investigation extended to what today is considered as culturally relevant, to address to a compatible and sustainable conservation without hindering innovation, to continue to benefit by the historical buildings in their appreciation of historical and environmental values and of productive resources.

The analysis of the consistence of the territory of the Susa Valley comes through the comparison between the historical maps and the present state of the cultivations and of the settlements, verifying permanencies and variations and recognizing the "criticality" of the different sections. The division in these sections is just handy for the individuation of "sub-areas" homogeneous for their altimetric distribution and territorial typology, keeping particular attention to the different side of the valley.

The complex and mutual relations between architectures and territory show how some structures rooted in the landscape are now a kind of overwritten documents, but clearly readable and understandable.

CONCLUSIONS

The project of conservation must therefore provide for the management of changes and for the sustainability of choices, taking into account the patrimonial, social and economical aspects, so as to be an integrant part of the planning and sustainability of each community.

Acknowledging historical farmhouses, villas and residences, routes, irrigation canals, design and consistence of forests and cultivations, that in their system constitute the agrarian landscape, as cultural heritage in the lists of the items to protect doesn't involve – other than a diligent conservation of some single emblematic objects - the immutability of consistencies, but their extension to a careful increasing of values, adapting promotional strategies and productive upgrading.

Strategies have not to be identified individually, but looked for in an enlarged vision of the territory. The tactic consists in tracing the specific and strong connections with the past, in allowing continuity where possible and in searching the productivity in the proper use of resources, land, settlements, cultivations and natural characters.

This is a real project of conservation, consistent with the trend of the European Convention that applies its disposals both on landscapes defined as exceptional and on those of everyday life, and on those degraded with the aim to promote, according to the necessities, the redemption, the preservation, the management and the planning in a wider program of international cooperation with an interdisciplinary point of view.